

Date of Meeting	15 th March 2007
Title of Report	Empty Homes Strategy 2007 - 2009
Portfolio	Housing
Link to Corporate Priorities	Housing
Key Decision	Yes
Executive Workplan Ref	B307
Public Report	Yes

Summary of Report

This report seeks Members' approval for the Empty Homes Strategy 2007-2009 including the future options (p. 17 – 18) and the Action Plan (p.19 – 20)

Officer Recommendations

Members approve the Empty Homes Strategy 2007-2009 including the future options and Action Plan.

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Contact Officer

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1. Introduction

1.1 The report seeks Member's approval for the Empty Homes Strategy 2007-2009.

2. Options and Options Appraisal

2.1 Option One: Approve the Empty Homes Strategy 2007 - 2009

2.2 Option Two: Amend and approve the Empty Homes Strategy 2007 – 2009

2.3 Option Three: Defer approval of the Empty Homes Strategy 2007 –2009 requiring further actions and amendments to be proposed.

3. Background Information

3.1 The Empty Homes Strategy will enable the Private Sector Housing Team to encourage and assist the owners of empty properties to bring properties back into use.

3.2 This strategy is a sub-strategy of the Private Sector Renewal Strategy 2006 – 2009 which is in turn a sub-strategy of the Housing Strategy 2005 – 2008 (see p. 4 of the strategy for a strategy map).

3.3 By bringing properties back into use there will be an increase in the amount of housing available and this may reduce the number of individuals waiting to be housed on the Housing Register. The Housing Stock Condition survey completed in 2003/04 identified 620 empty properties in the district.

3.4 The advantages of bringing these properties back into use include an increase in housing supply, a potential financial saving as it is often more cost effective to renovate an existing property than build a new one and an improvement to the environment of the area including saving the resources required to build a new property.

3.5 The strategy offers owners of empty properties a variety of options. The options include contacting owners to offer advice through the provision of leaflets and assistance from the Private Sector Team and offering an incentive to owners through the promotion of an Empty Home Grant to bring the property up to standard provided with a requirement to let the property to council nominated tenants for a period of 5 years. The strategy also seeks to consider the Housing Act 2004 enforcement powers to make Empty Dwelling Management Orders. These Orders give Local Authorities powers to take over the management of empty properties.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 The Empty Homes Grant is funded through discretionary grant assistance.

4.2 In 2006/07 the Government provided the Council with a capital grant of £446,000 to fund discretionary grant assistance of which £40,000 was allocated for funding grants for empty properties.

4.3 It is proposed that a similar sum be allocated to fund empty homes grants in future years subject to continued capital grant funding from the Government.

- 4.4 The strategy estimates that this capital funding will amount to £400,000 per year in line with the proposed capital strategy and budget for 2007-2010.
- 4.5 A change to the capital grant provided by the Government will require a review of the funding available for empty homes grants.
- 4.6 The other options proposed in the strategy to bring empty properties back into use will not be affected by a change in the amount of grant funding available.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 Local Authorities have powers under the Housing Act 2004 to make Empty Dwelling Management Orders. The Strategy will review whether these powers are relevant to the district.

6. Community and Environmental Implications

- 6.1 The Strategy's focus on the bringing back into use of Empty Properties will improve the quality of Housing throughout the district, and will have a positive impact on improving the environment of the neighbourhoods affected by empty properties.

7. Human Resource Implications

- 7.1 The Private Sector Housing Team consists of a Principal Private Sector Housing Officer and 2.5 Private Sector Housing Officers. The Private Sector Housing team will be responsible for implementing the Empty Home Strategy. The Team also administers a range of mandatory and discretionary private sector housing grants. These includes grants for Disabled Facility Adaptations for bringing properties up to the Decent Home Standard and for improving the energy efficiency of residential properties.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 8.1 An Equality & Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed on the draft strategy and no resulting actions were identified, a copy of the assessment is available on request.

9. Risk Analysis

- 9.1 There are no risks associated with following the recommendations.

Appendices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix 1 : Empty Home Strategy 2007-2009
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Act 2004 • Housing Renewal Strategy 2006-2009

Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
None		